Amendments to the Claims

1. (original) A method comprising the steps of

    (a)   storing in at least one data store in operative connection with at least one computer, data representative of at least one patient and at least one medical item prescribed for use by the patient;

    (b)   storing in the data store, data representative of a plurality of holding locations for medical items in a medical item dispenser, a plurality of types of medical items, and for each of the storage locations, a type medical item stored in the respective storage location;

    (c)   inputting through an input device in operative connection with the computer and the dispenser, data corresponding to the patient;

    (d)   dispensing from the dispenser responsive to the data stored in the data store, the type medical item prescribed for use by the patient, wherein the type medical item is dispensed from a storage location holding the type medical item in the dispenser;

(e)   including in the data store responsive to execution of step (d), data representative that the type medical item has been dispensed for use by the patient, and that the type medical item has been dispensed from the dispenser.

2. (original) The method according to claim 1 and further comprising the steps of:

storing in the data store, data representative of a benefit plan associated with the patient, and payment rules concerning payment for medical items associated with the benefit plan;

and further comprising the step of charging for the dispensed medical item in accordance with the payment rules.

3. (original) The method according to claim 2 and further comprising the step of:

reading a credit or debit card with a card reading device adjacent the dispenser, wherein the card reading device is in operative connection with the computer, and wherein the charging step includes charging an account associated with the credit or debit card.

4. (original) The method according to claim 2 wherein data representative of a benefits provider is stored in correlated relation with data representative of a benefit plan, and wherein the charging step includes charging the benefits provider.

5. (original) The method according to claim 3 wherein data representative of a benefits provider is stored in correlated relation with the data representative of the benefit plan, and wherein the rules concerning payment associated with the patient include a co-pay requirement associated with the use of the medical item, and further comprising the step of calculating a co-payment amount associated with the medical item, and wherein in the charging step the account is charged the co-pay amount.

6. (original) The method according to claim 5 and further comprising the step of calculating a benefit amount associated with the medical item, and wherein the charging step comprises charging the benefits provider the benefit amount.

7. (original) The method according to claim 5 and prior to the charging step, further comprising the step of outputting through an output device adjacent to the dispenser, indicia representative of the co-pay amount.

8. (original) The method according to claim 7 and prior to the charging step, further comprising the step of receiving through an input device adjacent the dispenser, an input indicative of acceptance of the co-pay amount.

9. (original) The method according to claim 1 and further comprising the steps of:

storing in the data store, data representative of a plurality of benefit plans, and for each benefit plan, corresponding payment rules concerning payment for medical items;

storing in the data store, data representative of a benefit plan associated with the patient;

responsive to input of data corresponding to the patient in step (c), determining responsive to operation of the computer a benefit plan associated with the patient; and

charging for the medical item in accordance with the payment rules associated with the benefit plan determined to be associated with the patient.

10. (original) The method according to claim 1 and prior to step (d) further comprising the step of displaying on an output device adjacent to the dispenser, display indicia including indicia indicative of the type medical item.

11. (original) The method according to claim 10 and prior to step (d) further comprising the step of receiving an input through an input device indicating agreement with the display indicia.

12. (original) The method according to claim 11 and prior to step (a), inputting through a physician terminal in operative connection with the computer, prescription data representative of information that the medical item has been prescribed for the patient, and a medical condition for which the medical item has been prescribed, wherein in step (a) the data stored includes prescription data, and wherein in the displaying step the display indicia includes indicia indicative of the medical condition.

13. (original) The method according to claim 11 and prior to step (a) inputting through a physician terminal in operative connection with the computer, prescription data representative of information that the medical item has been prescribed for the patient and a physician name corresponding to a physician prescribing the medical item for the patient, and wherein in step (a) the data stored includes prescription data, and wherein in the displaying step the display indicia includes indicia indicative of the physician name.

14. (original) The method according to claim 13 and further comprising the step of applying in connection with the dispensed type medical item, indicia indicative of the physician name.

15. (original) The method according to claim 14 wherein the prescription data includes data indicative of an instruction for using the type medical item, and wherein in the applying step, indicia indicative of the instruction for using the type medical item is applied in connection with the type medical item dispensed in step (d).

16. (original) The method according to claim 1 and prior to step (a), inputting through a physician terminal in operative connection with the computer, prescription data representative that the medical item has been prescribed for the patient, wherein in step (a) the data stored includes prescription data.

17. (original) The method according to claim 16 and further comprising the step of applying to the type medical item, indicia indicative of data included in the prescription data.

18. (original) The method according to claim 17 wherein the prescription data includes an instruction for using the type medical item, and wherein in the applying step the indicia applied to the medical item includes indicia indicative of the instruction.

19. (original) The method according to claim 17 and further comprising prior to the applying step, printing a prescription label, wherein the prescription label includes the indicia indicative of the data included in the prescription data, wherein in the applying step the label is applied in connection with the type medical item.

20. (original) The method according to claim 17 wherein the applying step is executed prior to step (d), wherein the indicia indicative of data included in prescription data is applied to the type medical item to be dispensed in step (d).

21. (original) The method according to claim 19 wherein the applying step is executed subsequent to step (d).

22. (original) The method according to claim 21 and further comprising sensing the taking of the label after execution of step (d) wherein the medical item is dispensed, and preventing further dispensing by the dispenser until the label is sensed as taken.

23. (original) The method according to claim 1 wherein step (a) includes storing in the data store, data representative of a plurality of patients, and for each of the patients at least one type medical item prescribed for use by the patient, repeatedly executing steps (a) through (e) wherein data corresponding to different ones of the plurality of patients is input in subsequent executions of step (c), and wherein in each step (d) the type medical item dispensed corresponds to the medical item prescribed for the one patient corresponding to the data input in the step (c) immediately executed prior to the execution of each step (d).

24. (original) The method according to claim 23 and further comprising after executing a particular step (c), failing to execute (d) and further comprising the step of contacting the patient corresponding to the data input in the particular step (c).

25. (original) The method according to claim 23 wherein the data in the data store includes data representative of a physician corresponding to at least one particular medical item prescribed for at least one patient, and wherein in a particular step (c) the data corresponding to the particular patient is input, and thereafter step (d) is not executed, whereby the particular medical item is not dispensed, and further comprising the step of contacting the physician responsive to failing to carry out step (d).

26. (currently amended) ~~The method according to claim 1 and prior to step (d) further comprising the step of~~ A method comprising:

(a) storing in at least one data store in operative connection with at least one computer, data representative of at least one patient and at least one type medical item prescribed for use by the at least one patient;

(b) storing in the data store, data representative of a plurality of holding locations for medical items in a medical item dispenser, a plurality of types of medical items, and for each of the storage locations, a type medical item stored in the respective storage location;

(c) inputting through an input device in operative connection with the computer and the dispenser, data corresponding to a patient;

(d)   checking data in the data store representative of a medical history of the patient

corresponding to the data ~~representative of the patient~~ input in ~~either of step (a) or~~

step (c), and determining <u>based on</u> ~~responsive to~~ the medical history data if ~~the~~ <u>a</u>

<u>type</u> medical item <u>prescribed for use by the patient</u> should be withheld from the

patient<u>;</u> ~~, wherein step (d) is either executed or not executed~~

(e)   responsive to ~~the~~ <u>a</u> determination made <u>in step (d) that the type medical item</u>

<u>should not be withheld from the patient,</u> ~~based on the medical history data~~

<u>causing the dispenser to dispense the type medical item from a storage location in</u>

<u>the dispenser; and</u>

(f)   <u>including in the data store responsive to execution of step (e), data representative</u>

<u>that the type medical item has been dispensed for use by the patient, and that the</u>

<u>type medical item has been dispensed from the dispenser.</u>

27. (original) The method according to claim 26 wherein the checking step includes

communicating over a public data network.

28. (previously presented) The method according to claim 1 wherein the dispenser comprises a

patient-accessible self-service medical item dispenser.

29. (previously presented) The method according to claim 2 and further comprising

  (f) prior to (d), receiving input from a patient through at least one input device in operative connection with the computer and the dispenser.

30. (previously presented) The method according to claim 29 wherein (f) includes receiving dispense request input from the patient corresponding to at least one medical item prescribed for use by the patient.

31. (previously presented) The method according to claim 30 wherein (f) further includes receiving a payment from the patient corresponding to the at least one medical item requested in the dispense request input.

32. (previously presented) The method according to claim 31 wherein the at least one input device includes a card reader device, wherein the card reader device is in operative connection with the computer, and further comprising

  (g) reading a credit or debit card with the card reader device, and charging an account associated with the credit or debit card.

33. (previously presented) The method according to claim 31 wherein the payment comprises a co-payment, wherein (f) includes receiving the co-payment from the patient corresponding to the at least one medical item requested in the dispense request input.

34. (previously presented) A method comprising

    (a)   storing in at least one data store in operative connection with at least one computer, data representative of each of

           at least one patient,

           at least one medical item prescribed for use by the at least one patient, and

           at least one medical item stored in a patient-accessible self service medical item dispenser apparatus, wherein the dispenser apparatus is operative to receive at least one input from the at least one patient;

    (b)   receiving at least one input through at least one input device of the dispenser apparatus, wherein the at least one input includes a request to dispense to a first patient at least one medical item prescribed for use by the first patient;

(c)   responsive to the request to dispense, instructing the dispenser apparatus to

dispense the requested at least one medical item to the first patient;

(d)   verifying with the dispenser apparatus that the requested at least one medical item

was dispensed;

(e)   responsive to the verification, including in the data store, data linking the verified

dispensed at least one medical item to the first patient.

35. (previously presented) The method according to claim 34 wherein (e) further includes

responsive to the verification, including in the data store, data linking each of

the first patient,

the dispensed at least one medical item, and

location of dispensing the at least one medical item.

36. (previously presented) The method according to claim 34 and further comprising

(f)   receiving another at least one input through the at least one input device of the

dispenser apparatus, wherein the another at least one input includes a request to

dispense to a second patient at least one medical item prescribed for use by the second patient;

(g) responsive to the request to dispense to the second patient, instructing the dispenser apparatus to dispense the requested at least one medical item to the second patient.

37. (previously presented) The method according to claim 34 wherein the dispenser apparatus includes at least a first dispenser and a second dispenser, wherein (b) includes receiving dispense request input from the first patient through an input device in operative connection with the first dispenser, and further comprising

(f) receiving dispense request input from the second patient through an input device in operative connection with the second dispenser;

(g) responsive to (f), instructing the second dispenser to dispense to the second patient at least one medical item prescribed for use by the second patient;

38. (previously presented) The method according to claim 34 and further comprising

(f) prior to (c), receiving with the dispenser apparatus a patient payment input.

39. (previously presented) The method according to claim 38 and further comprising receiving a patient payment corresponding to the at least one medical item requested in the dispense request input.

40. (previously presented) The method according to claim 39 wherein the patient payment comprises a patient co-payment, and further comprising receiving the patient co-payment corresponding to the at least one medical item requested in the dispense request input.

41. (previously presented) The method according to claim 38 wherein the dispenser apparatus includes a card reader device, wherein the card reader device is in operative connection with the computer, and further comprising

     (g)   reading a credit or debit card with the card reader device, and further comprising charging an account associated with the credit or debit card.

42. (previously presented) The method according to claim 38 wherein the dispenser apparatus includes a display screen, and further comprising

     (g)   prior to (c), displaying a payment amount to the patient with the display screen.

43. (previously presented) The method according to claim 34 and further comprising

(f)   prior to (c), determining whether the at least one medical item corresponding to the dispense request input is available for dispensing from the dispenser apparatus.

44. (previously presented) The method according to claim 34 wherein (d) further comprises at least one sensor in the dispenser apparatus transmitting at least one signal responsive to the at least one sensor sensing a passing of the requested at least one medical item, and (e) further comprises including in the data store verification of the dispensing of the at least one medical item.

45. (previously presented) A method comprising

(a)   storing in at least one data store in operative connection with at least one computer, data representative of each of

a plurality of medical item storage locations in a patient-accessible self service medical item dispenser apparatus,

a plurality of types of medical items,

the type of medical item stored in each respective storage location,

at least one patient, and

at least one medical item type prescribed for use by the at least one patient;

(b) receiving patient identification data from a patient through at least one input device of the dispenser apparatus;

(c) receiving from the patient through the at least one input device a request to dispense at least one medical item type prescribed for use by the patient;

(d) reading a credit or debit card with a card reader device of the dispenser apparatus;

(e) charging an amount to an account associated with the credit or debit card, wherein the amount corresponds to a payment associated with the requested at least one medical item type;

(f) instructing the dispenser apparatus to dispense to the patient the requested at least one medical item type;

(g) dispensing from the dispenser apparatus to the patient the requested at least one medical item type, wherein the at least one medical item type is dispensed from at least one storage location holding the at least one medical item type;

(h)   verifying with the dispenser apparatus that the requested at least one medical item

type was dispensed to the patient, including at least one sensor in the dispenser

apparatus transmitting at least one signal to the computer responsive to the at least

one sensor sensing a passing of the requested at least one medical item type;

(i)   including in the at least one data store responsive to (h), data linking each of

the patient,

the verified dispensed at least one medical item type, and

location of the dispensing of the verified dispensed at least one medical

item type.